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FRANCOPHONE MUSIC JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Music to the heart's content at Coup de coeur

Of all the francophone chanson festivals, Le Coup de coeur francophone is known for its singular blend of innovation and discovery. The opening concert of its 20th edition, tonight at 9 at Lion d'Or, is a case in point: Le Silence des hommes, a collaboration between spoken-word partisan D. Kimm (a co-founder of Festival Voix d'Amériques festival and Les Filles électriques) and cutting-edge guitarist Bernard Falaise (of Les Projectionnistes, Miriodor, Foodsoon and many more groups).

"The first reason I decided to do this show was the desire to work with Bernard," Kimm said recently. "He's been involved in a lot of our projects (for Les Voix) and I think he's both incredibly open-minded and yet very rigorous, very demanding. He pushed me on my journey."

That path includes "having a real relationship with the music, with no hierarchy between texts and music. I'm trying to move the texts with my voice and not simply interpret them. I want to range from very loud to a whisper ..."

One of the high points is Les Rivières, an erotic suite about a troubled woman that creates the mood of "a strange movie you don't understand but don't want to leave."

In addition to a crack quintet of musicians (including François Lafontaine of Karkwa and Alexis Martin of Charlebois), Kimm has written songs for this event specifically for three singular voices: Michel Faubert (who just released the enthusiastically received La Fin du monde with producer Jérôme Minière), André Duchesne and Pierre Cartier. "I know each of them well," she notes. "I wanted to have them sing love songs a woman would like to hear with her body."

The Coup de coeur festival gives veteran rocker Fred Fortin a chance to hear how a contemporary classical outfit, Le Consort contemporain de Québec, interprets 15 of his songs (next Friday, Nov. 10 at Club Soda). "I have no choice but to do it their way, and that's part of the adventure," says Fortin, who will join them on stage.

When he also mentions the word "rigorous" to describe Le Consort's arrangements, that seems fitting because the iron-clad symphonic rock on his last album, Planter le décor, has a kind of grandeur that gives life experience a little extra oomph. Collaboration in Fortin's middle name – he also plays drums with Galaxie 500 and Les Breastfeeders, and started up the indie C-4 Records to help promote local music.

Another Coup highlight: the Ligue d'improvisation Musicale de Montréal, which runs over two consecutive nights at Petit Campus (starting at 8 p.m. on Nov. 8 and 9), affording one-stop shopping for the four teams that make up the Montreal division in a four-city league (along with Quebec City, Trois Rivières and Saguenay) now in its fourth season.

It is in a high-octane format – teams face off in musical and comedy interpretations of themes suggested by the audience, who vote for winners of each skit – that the likes of Falaise, Urbain Deshois, Philippe Brault, Chafik, Guido Del Fabbro and other top musicians flash their collaborative improv chops. Call it organized chaos, but the surprise is how consistently entertaining these soirées are.

Season-to-season tweaking – this year a DJ between periods – keeps the improv' event "running smoothly, that's the key," says league co-founder and booking agent Eric Harvey. "There's a lot of people involved (from a referee to play-by-play commentators) and it takes a lot of volunteers." A "friendly sense of competition," word-of-mouth and loyal local sponsors, rather than government funding, have made Impro Musicale a must-do on the cultural calendar.

"I never did anything like this before," says Harvey. "In fact this kind of divertissement hasn't really been done anywhere else, to my knowledge. It would be fun to find rivals abroad." As for now, fans will doubtless content themselves with sporting new T-shirts from sponsoring Montreal bars (Quai des Brumes, Chez Baptiste, Divan Orange and Petit Cafe Campus).

Amidst all this stream of musical consciousness, the atmosphere at this year's Coup de coeur is dizzy enough for Jack Kerouac set to music by veteran bassist Normand Guilbeault (tomorrow at 8 p.m. at Maison de la Culture Frontenac). With his Franco-American roots in Massachusetts, the beat bard casts a lingering spell on Quebec pop and avant culture. Guilbeault fingers fleet notes to a sample of Kerouac extolling the bebop of Bird and Monk, and then his band kicks in along with riotous French translations that have a carnivalesque feel to them.

For ticket and schedule information for **Coup de coeur**, starting today and running through Nov. 12, go to www.coupdecoeur.qc.ca

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In praise of Plume

GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Latraverse performing in 2005.

Plume Latraverse has been called the most "underrated" superstar in the Quebec song firmament since his beginnings in the 1970s. He does not have a huge following but most everyone has an image of Plume as his own man, no matter what style is in or out. So tonight's free tribute concert, Chapeau à Plume (at the Spectrum, presented by the Coup de coeur festival and Radio-Canada's Espace Musique), is a chance to see how leading singers of the new generation relate to Latraverse's unique – crude and rude – personality.

Pierre Lapointe, this year's big star, remembers his first exposure to Plume's irreverent charms: "At first glance, he was so vulgar and as I was very small, I was very impressed by that sort of arrogance. Yet, to write the kind of songs he's written takes a very out-of-the-ordinary talent. He has always played at the margins, yet he's quite inimitable; you can't imitate him, yet he's been very influential over the years."

Lapointe mentions that he's never met Latraverse: "I think he's the kind of guy who, if I met him, I wouldn't know what to say to him."

Thomas Hellman, also appearing at tonight's tribute, met him last year while taping the Belle et Bum TV show. Coming from an anglo background, Hellman "knew that Plume was a legend but I wasn't familiar with a lot of his stuff. It's unbelievable how many songs he's written.

"He's got such a raw sound. There's a lot of humour yet a lot of depth. He just does whatever he likes. He's a character who is unlike anyone on the Quebec scene or, for that matter, anywhere on the planet."

Tonight's show, starting at 8, also includes performances by Gilles Vigneault, Vincent Vallières, Louise Forestier, Damien Robitaille, Éric Lapointe, Les Denis Drolet and surprise guest artists.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

THRILL JOCKEY RECORDS

"We were in a cycle of working and touring for four years straight. It was good to stop and take a breath," says Califone's Tim Rutili, right.

TOO MUCH WORK had taken its toll on Califone. But a little time off and a chance rediscovery of a 'hippie anthem' led to their best CD yet

It started with Orchids

"If I'm at a wedding, and some cousin I haven't seen since I was 5 says, 'What kind of band do you play in?,' I say it's a rock band. But I try to say as little as possible, and talk about sports instead."

Tim Rutili is explaining the stylistic allegiances, or lack thereof, of his band Califone. For descriptive purposes, the Chicago-based group falls somewhere between post-rock and Americana. Think Wilco meets Calexico.

"I feel more in common with ('70s Krautrock band) Can, or Captain Beefheart, than Ryan Adams or Willie Nelson," he continued. "I feel like we're an experimental band. We work with traditional American songwriting, but we use it the same way as white noise in our shoes."

Before Califone, Rutili and bandmate Ben Massarella played in blues-rock group Red Red Meat. In 2002, he collaborated with Modest Mouse's Isaac Brock and others under the name Ugly Casanova. And last year, Califone backed up alt-country act Freakwater on its album Thinking of You.

Califone's new record Roots and Crowns is possibly the best of its eight-year career – a moving synthesis of warm, folky

T'CHA DUNLEVY

melodies, rhythmic flourishes and occasional ambient noise.

It came together as the group emerged from an unhealthy haze of all work and no play, or all play and no rest.

"It started with us trying to figure out if we wanted to continue as a band," Rutili said. "(The result) has a lot to do with sleep habits, taking time off, and approaching music from a place of clarity rather than a place of frantic activity. ... We were in a cycle of working and touring for four years straight. It was good to stop and take a breath."

Roots and Crowns breathes. It finds Rutili getting comfortable with his disparate influences, bringing them together with unprecedented ease and making peace with his music.

"It was less of a struggle," he said, "less of a fight. Instead of being a pain in the ass to use structure and form, this time it was a pleasure to give things a more composed shape."

Through he was already versed in sonic textures, Rutili found renewed inspiration in the art of songwriting.

"I had been working on scoring films," he said, "a couple of us had. That's not writing songs at all. (On this album), it became fun to make sure each song had a really good melody ... A lot of stuff came together on this record, stuff we had been fighting with for years. We got it right this time."

The initial inspiration came from The Orchids, a "hippie anthem" (his words) by the group Psychic TV.

"It was a song a friend had put on a mixed CD. I moved, it was in a box, I unpacked and put it on, I had heard it before, but I had a weird reaction to it. I listened to it every day. I wasn't writing songs (at the time); I was working on TV and film stuff. It made me want to write songs again, to do something that good. To me it was almost as good as a Velvet Underground song, which is as good as it gets as far as songwriting goes."

Califone covers The Orchids on Roots and Crowns. It is a light, bright and decidedly pretty song that stands out like a timeless hymn. "And in the morning after night / I fall in love with the night," Rutili sings, in earnest.

It's a clear indication of where his head is at – in a good place. Roots and Crowns is a low-key record. Spearheaded by Rutili's sense of purpose, it is at once solemn, intuitive and uplifting.

"A lot of the time for us, making music is striving for the balance between ... sounds that should be fighting each other. It's also something that is comforting, like a little break from the world.

"It feels like when you leave your house everyday, you can't help but get screamed at by everything. I don't want to scream at people. It seems like it's more punk to be quiet. It's more subversive to do something relaxing, and relaxed. For me, making this music is like saying prayers. It's very meditative."

Califone performs Monday at La Sala Rossa, 4848 St. Laurent Blvd., with Flection Bigsky. Tickets cost $12 in advance, $14 at the door. Call 514-284-0122.

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CAPSULE REVIEW

Brother-sister duo scary good

The Fiery Furnaces

Le Tulipe
Tuesday

It's a measure of the Fiery Furnaces' freakiness that, after impressively gonzo sets from Deerhoof (in cult robes) and Montreal's Crystal Cliffs (in caveman skins and ikon suits), they managed to be the scariest band at a packed La Tulipe without the aid of Halloween outfits. Chalk it up to the unpredictable mutations of their cryptic word-nerd delights: Even songs from the recent Bitter Tea album – condensed into a massive medley – were nearly unrecognizable, heavy on spastic guitar and percussion.

Eleanor Friedberger is a riveting singer on a good night – part Patti Smith confrontation, part Cat Power evasiveness – and, as it turned out, on a bad one, as she fought voice problems with clenched fists. She won thanks to frightening determination, while brother/keyboardist Matthew Friedberger cheered her on.

JORDAN ZIVITZ

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